George Moore Dogmatizes on the Drama

By BARRETT H. CLARK.

I HAD been warned by his former friends in Dublin that George Moore's bark was much worse than his bite, but I was none the less apprehensive, for I wanted to meet the George Moore of *Hail and Farewell* and hear him discourse in characteristic style, but at the same time I felt a little timid lest he should think me the usual transatlantic lion hunter. I had quite persuaded myself that my errand was a purely literary one and that curiosity was not my motive. But I *was* curious.

The tall Georgian house in Ebury street, London, was of course just such a house as George Moore would select—after due consultation and conversation with his cronies. The hallway was hung with etchings and the cosey parlor furnished with well worn mid-Victorian relics. Moore had evidently transferred his actions from the Georgian to the mid-Victorian. I imagine I took this in as well as the white marble fireplace, the comfortable sofa and arm chair, within half a minute, while I carefully rehearsed my little speech: "Charmed to meet you, Mr. Moore. I should never have thought of troubling you, you——," and before I had time to launch forth the man himself stood in the doorway, a wisp of white hair nearly touching the curtain at the top.

White Sheep or Black?

He is tall, gaunt and round shouldered. The droop of his moustache and the slight wave of his silver hair accentuated the appearance of round shoulderedness. The face is the well known face of the sketches and photographs—long, lean, the Moore face, "like a sheep's," I think he somewhere describes it.

"Sit down, young man," he began, and seated himself close to the fire. I took a chair from the corner and sat opposite. He threw himself back, ran his hand through his hair, put it back into the pocket of his smoking jacket and immediately came to the point.

Shaw! Brieux!

"Don't make apologies, young man. They are waste of time. You want my opinions on the theatre and the drama. Very well. Don't interrupt me, please." And he began, lucidly, dogmatically, to lay down the law. There was no mistaking him. "Our present drama is doomed to failure. The modern dramatists of this country have no sense of literary form. There is Bernard Shaw, for instance—a jolly good fellow: I like him immensely—but the *English* he writes makes me sick. Always ideas, and problems, and theses; nothing else! And there is that—Brieux (here he purposely mispronounced the name to emphasize his contempt for Brieux's lack of literary distinction), Brieux, with not the slightest sense of form, no feeling for beauty!

"Not only have we here no sense for literature: we have not yet learned the art of presenting beautiful pictures in stage settings. Why should I be forced to sit through an evening at the theatre gaping at an ugly canvas or set the like of which I would shudder to behold and turn away from at an exhibit of pictures?

"Commercial management? Yes, I suppose so. What we need more than anything else in this country—and I fancy in yours 'oo—is a free theatre, where a man with a taste for literature may have a fair chance to experiment. Yes, we've had them before; there was Grein and his independent theatre, and Barker some years after, but we need a new theatre."

Farewell to Erin.

Moore then fell into a reminiscent vein and the talk shifted—or rather I directed it—to matters of more personal nature. I had just finished reading the third volume of *Hail and Farewell*, that monumental wholesale autobiography. Having come direct from Lady Gregory at Coole Park in Galway, and knowing how she felt about the rather tactless treatment of her kindly character in Moore's latest book, I was frankly curious to sound the author and learn his side of the story. He informed me that his Irish period was over. I fancy that having turned his material into a work of art, he was no longer interested in the sources. Whether his victims smarted or not was of little importance to him.

"They were all people whom I should have used at some time or another, just as I put Yeats and Edward Martyn into *Evelyn Innes*. Instead of resorting to the makeshift of psuedonymity, I have set them forth as themselves. Why not allow them the benefit of my character analysis while they are still alive?"

Lady Gregory's Catalpa.

I felt in duty bound to divulge what Lady Gregory had told me about her feelings when she read *Ave;* or rather, her implication. At Coole Park she had told me that she took offence at but one passage in the whole book. Moore had, in describing the environs of the little lake at Coole, referred to a "weeping ash." It was a catalpa, however, which her grandfather had brought over years ago from America. "Now, I hate weeping trees of all sorts and I don't like to have any one say that I have them at Coole." Moore laughed and said it made no difference, but maliciously added: "I rather think, though, that it *was* a weeping ash!" He showed some curiosity as to the attitude of Lady Gregory, Yeats and the others, and asked whether I knew how they felt about being put into his book. I told him what I thought to be the truth: "They all intimated that they thought they had been outraged, but I am positive they were secretly flattered." He chuckled.

Moore lapsed into silence for a moment and I took occasion to make a few remarks on *Hail and Farewell*. In the course of our conversation I said that I thought a certain episode in *Vale* was a tour de force. With a real or feigned concern his brows contracted and he said, "Don't use a French phrase when an English one will do just as well!" I started to apologize, a little bewildered at this from a writer who was himself over fond of using French when English would even better have expressed his meaning.

It was with great satisfaction that I smiled when toward the end of our interview the same George Moore who had warned me against using foreign phrases replied to a question with "Cela va sans dire!" He too broke into a smile and said, "I have a right, young man. I am much older than you!"

Edmond Rostand Praises "Under Fire"

TO THE EDITOR OF *BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD*—*Sir:* Possibly the most widely and seriously discussed book published since the beginning of the war is *Under Fire* [*Le Feu*], by Henri Barbusse.

In the opinion of many of the leading American literary critics this book stands head and shoulders above all other war books so far published. In my opinion *Under Fire* is a work of genius by an artist, and the book is destined to live as the greatest book yet published dealing with the war.

Some few critics have taken occasion to attack *Under Fire*, and by all odds the most conspicuous of these critics were Mr. Hearst in the New York *American* and an article in the Chicago *Tribune*. One of these unfavorable criticisms reached the author of *Under Fire* and was the cause of two letters, which I enclose, one from Henri Barbusse and one from Edmond Rostand, the French dramatist.

I take the liberty of sending you these two letters with the hope that you will think as I do, that they form a notable item of literary news of peculiar interest and charm, especially the reply of Edmond Rostand, and I hope that you will make a place for the publication of these letters.

Henri Barbusse was an author of high standing when France was attacked by Germany. Barbusse at once laid aside all matters and enlisted as a private in the French army. He fought for eighteen months, thus demonstrating his patriotism beyond the shadow of a doubt. Barbusse as a result of his eighteen months of terrible exposure in the trenches has contracted a serious and painful disease which has so far proved incurable.

JOHN MACRAE,
Vice-president, E. P. Dutton & Co.

NEW YORK, August 1.

TRANSLATION of letter from Henri Barbusse to Hugh R. Dent, May 30, 1918:

DEAR MR. DENT: I learn by the newspapers that a French officer on a mission to America has given a lecture at Chicago in which he has forcibly criticised *Le Feu*. This action, of which the Sunday *Tribune* speaks, and on which certain French reactionary and clerical papers comment, has surprised me. I did not think that the manœuvres of my political enemies, that is to say, the anti-democratic elements in France, would go as far as utilizing official action against me, and especially since the Minister of Public Instruction has just recently again nominated me a member of the Consultative Committee of French Propaganda in Foreign Countries.

However that may be, I think there is no reason to leave the attack unanswered. On reflection, the best way seems to me to send to you, so that you may rely on it, a letter that I take from among the thousands I have received on the subject of *Le Feu*. It is from Edmond Rostand, whose prestige in America must be considerable. I send you a copy of it, begging you to send it in your turn to the United States, to have it published in the papers, and thus counterbalance the unjust and absurd opinion of which a Frenchman has thought fit to make himself the echo over yonder.

I am for a few hours in Paris at the above address.

Believe me, &c. HENRI BARBUSSE.

P. S. I have no need to tell you that the ideas of my book commending the continuation of the war against German militarism and (commending) a lasting peace by the union of the democracies are exactly those commended by the great voice of President Wilson, to whom I have often done homage in articles. The divergency of opinions referred to by Rostand are exclusively concerned with the religious question and that of the glory belonging to the common soldiers.

TO Henri Barbusse, of the Thirtieth Regiment of Territorial Infantry.

MY DEAR FRIEND—I admire *Le Feu* because it is a poem—a great poem, tumultuous and admirably arranged. There is in it what I like most in the world—infinite detail, without meretricious glitter. Such detail is only permissible against a background of inspiration and epic movement. Visionary and man inspired you are both; that is doubtless why your book commands the admiration even of those who do not accept all the opinions in it. All whom I have heard discussing it up to the present are unanimously agreed on its literary beauty and its tremendously real significance.

I remember the day when you came to say to me: "Voila, I am enlisting because I hate war. The more one thinks as I do the greater is the necessity to shoulder a rifle this time—which must be the last." Again I see the calm and terrible beauty in your face, and your implacable pallor. It is just that beauty, the frigid and sublime anger in your look, the tranquil exasperation on your features, the haughty poetry that mysteriously surrounded you, the noble hatred which from time to time straightened your tall figure with a start, as you seemed to be already stooping over the stretchers in immense compassion—it is just that beauty that I have completely found again in *Le Feu*. At that moment bring back from the war a masterpiece of tragedy. I did not know at that time that it would mean the institution of the Croix de Guerre.

That I am not absolutely of your opinion on one or two points you will readily imagine, but when a man comes back from where you have been he has a right to say everything and must be given at least a respectful hearing. To hold our tongues and ponder all they tell us, who have been out there, is our sole duty of the moment.

I find, in a poem written a year ago, when I was returning from seeing our silent defenders at the front—

"Heroes!" my look said. "No"—
Replied their silence; "we
Are only men." That's less—and better!

Your work proves to me that my impression was the right one. You have modelled in the mud of the trenches the enduring statue of the New Soldier. When you passionately cover the war with mud, in spite of yourself that mud is magnificent. You give to those consecrated beings the glory which you say they must not have. And why should they not have it, the saviors of the world and of the future? *You* have it, yourself, in that you have portrayed them!

It is a splendid thing to have written a romance from which history will borrow. We will discuss other points later. Meanwhile, superb poet and soldier, I embrace you. EDMOND ROSTAND.

A mystery story called *The Queen's Heart*, probably by Ralph Adams Cram, is being published by Marshall Jones Company, Boston, under the name of J. H. Hildreth. The publishers say that the author kept the story in manuscript for twenty-five years and releases it now "because the reasons hitherto preventing publication are no longer operative."

Amelia E. Barr's new novel will be called *The Paper Cap*. D. Appleton & Co. have it.